Squall:
"A wind of considerable intensity caused by atmospheric instability. It forms and dissipates quickly and is often accompanied by thunder, lightning and rain."

Our rendezvous with the tuna vessel went smoothly, and the excellent crew is very eager to help us get started with our dolphin capture/recapture research. This project is truly a team effort between all scientists, NOAA vessel crew and officers, and the tuna vessel crew, and we have been lucky to assemble such an outstanding team. Unfortunately, the weather has decided not to be a team player for the moment, sending many squalls and increasingly rough seas during the last few days. The squalls are localized little regions of wind, rain, thunder, and lightning. As we approached one yesterday, the winds increased from 17 knots to over 50 knots in about 15 minutes. Then, after passing through some intense rain, the wind dropped back down to 18 knots within another 15-20 minutes. The squalls are simultaneously beautiful, fun, sometimes a bit scary, and mostly a real pain to work around trying to find some sufficiently calm weather for set operations. For now, we're still awaiting an opportunity to do a practice set before targeting our first dolphin school.

In between squalls, we have been able to conduct some flying bridge observations, and the tuna vessel has helped us search for dolphins using their own high-powered binoculars, a helicopter, and a so-called 'bird radar'. This bird radar has a special filter that allows it to detect large flocks of seabirds many miles away. The bird flocks are often associated with dolphins and tuna in the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean, and therefore a real help – both to fishermen targeting tuna, and to us searching for dolphins. During the last few days, we have seen about a dozen groups of spotted dolphins and spinner dolphins (plus some bottlenose and Risso's dolphins), indicating that at least we are in a good area for finding animals. Now if only that weather would settle down …